



Brockton, Massachusetts
"City of Champions"
Linda M. Balzotti – Mayor

Good morning.

I'd like to begin by congratulating our City Councilors and School Committee on their election, and to applaud them for their willingness to serve. I want to recognize our legislative delegation – Representatives Christine Canavan, Geraldine Creedon and Michael Brady are here, as is Senator Thomas Kennedy. I'd also like to recognize former mayors Jack Yunits and Carl Pitaro and the Plymouth County officials that are present: Clerk of Courts Robert Creedon, John Buckley, Registrar of Deeds and County Commissioners Tony O'Brien, Jack Riordan and Tim McMullen. I extend my appreciation and thanks to the clergy – Rev. Brian Smith of St. Edith Stein, Rev. Michael Walker of Messiah Baptist Church and Rabbi Arye Berkowitz of Temple Beth Emunah. Thank you to all of you for your contributions to our city and for your dedication to its citizens.

Most importantly, I want to thank all of the voters who made this historic moment possible. Some of you have known me from my earliest involvement in city government 25 years ago, many of you helped me run for Ward 4 Councilor, encouraged me and supported me in my bid for Councilor-at-Large and I thank all of you who went to the polls in November to elect me the first woman mayor of Brockton.

This is an important moment for me, but also for all of us – and especially for my family, who have always supported me, lifted me up and made my dreams possible. My mother, Betty, is here, my sisters, Gina Sheridan and Mary Valente and my brother, James Balzotti, are here. My brothers-in-law Gary Sheridan and

Joe Valente, and my nieces, Katie and Emily Sheridan are here, and I just wanted to thank them for their love and support.

My father, Genesio, didn't live to see this day, but I know that somewhere he is watching and is so very proud. Like so many of my fellow Brocktonians, my father's family came to Brockton for a better life for their children. They didn't speak the language, they didn't know the customs, but they knew the importance of hard work and the value of education.

My grandfather worked in a foundry and my grandmother had a garden behind their house on Spring Avenue. They worked hard and saved what they could so that the next generation would have more. My father played football at Brockton High School, and when he graduated, he went to work in a foundry like his father, laboring long hours so that my sisters, my brother and I could achieve what we aspired to.

And here I am today, Mayor of the City of Brockton. I hope that my election inspires young women to go into politics, and resonates among our newest residents that if you work hard, anything is possible. To all Brocktonians, I say: Your voice is important, your opinion matters and your service is needed.

I will be walking into one of the worst financial situations our city has ever faced. Without any additional revenues, I will have to cut millions of dollars from our budget, while working to maintain core services.

As your mayor, I am always going to tell it to you straight, so let's all walk into Fiscal 2011 with our eyes open.

That said, let's also remember that Brockton is – and always has been – a city of great promise. It's true, we're going to have to do more with less, but I believe

that it is how you face adversity that shapes your character, and that in times of struggle, leadership and a true sense of community is born.

I am asking everyone to pull together – to put our differences aside and to truly work together. Brockton is at a turning point: we will reach our lowest point financially in the summer, but if we come together for the collective good, we will come out of this crisis a stronger, tighter and better city. And I pledge to you that I will do everything in my power to retain every important service, every necessary program and every essential worker.

STABILIZING NEIGHBORHOODS

Brockton has been hit harder by the foreclosure crisis than any other community in the state: 44 per 1,000 housing units, according to the Federal Reserve. We've all seen the results in our neighborhoods: abandoned homes, overgrown lots, public safety hazards. As a City Councilor, I worked with my colleagues to introduce home rule petitions asking the Legislature to put a 180-day moratorium on foreclosure proceedings to allow homeowners an opportunity to access mortgage assistance programs and to give renters the flexibility to find new housing, without being turned out onto the street.

Whole neighborhoods suffer when houses are abandoned, and I believe that if Brockton is to rebound, our neighborhoods must be strengthened. I will work with banks, mortgage lenders, the Brockton Housing Partnership, the Brockton Interfaith Community and other outreach agencies to help homeowners explore every possible avenue to avoid foreclosure. I will work with our Code Enforcement Task Force and Board of Health to address safety and health concerns caused by abandoned or neglected properties, and I will work with the City Council on ordinances to force lenders to maintain bank-owned properties.

I am going to work to strengthen city ordinances and also explore using CDBG and grant funds to expand our code enforcement efforts so that our neighborhoods don't suffer unnecessarily. Our city employees are working incredibly hard to keep Brockton clean and safe. I am going to be spending my first few months visiting every city job site, meeting all of our employees, and asking them where they feel we could maximize our resources for the benefit of our citizens. The people on the ground know our services and structures better than anyone, and I think a mayor should ask employees for their opinions and involve them in the decision making process.

I've formed a Housing & Neighborhood Stabilization Task Force that will work to ensure all citizens have access to housing opportunities, that Brockton has enough code enforcement, and to look at quality of life issues in our neighborhoods. This Task Force is headed by Richard Sergi, executive director of the Brockton Housing Authority, and it includes residents, business owners, service agency representatives and other stakeholders who will work diligently to make sure that Brockton is a good place to live for all residents.

Our neighborhoods are the heart of our city, and we all have to work together to make them vibrant and safe communities for families, for working people and our senior citizens. So I am calling on neighbors to do their part, too: that means watching out for a house in your neighborhood that is in foreclosure: it means picking up litter and monitoring abandoned properties for illegal activity. It means taking care of the collective good, like shoveling sidewalks and cleaning out in front of fire hydrants, it means informing the Police Department, Mayor's Office and Code Enforcement Task when there's a problem, and being willing to step up. Prospective buyers are more likely to invest in a clean and orderly neighborhood, so we all have to protect our property values by looking out for our neighbors.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The biggest concern for the city is public safety: how many police and firefighters can we afford and how many can we not afford to lose. We will closely monitor neighborhood issues through the Compstat program, work to invigorate our Crime Watch activities across the city and I will make maintaining State Police high intensity patrols in Brockton a top priority.

We're seeing an upsurge in gang activity, especially among teenagers, and we're going to have to come together as a community to address it. Our response to public safety has to be multi-faceted.

As Chairman of the School Committee, I will convene a blue ribbon panel of police, school and city officials and community service agencies to study school safety and security.

In addition to the school safety study, I've formed two other task forces to look at our current system and determine our next course of action. The Public Safety Task Force, chaired by local attorney Joshua Wood, a partner in the law firm of Benzakian & Wood, will look at how law enforcement services work together - the police, court system, DA's office, and social service agencies - and find the strengths and weaknesses in our working partnerships with the express intent of building stronger communication and collaborative strategies to keep our city safe and criminals off the street.

The second group, our Street Violence Task Force, will address issues specifically affecting youth. The majority of the crime in our city is committed by people under 30, and more and more its young people aged 16-24. Koren Cappiello, director of community & social services for the Mayor's Office, will

head this task force, which will catalog the programs and services available to youth in this city, determine whether the funds available are being directed in the correct way, and identify better avenues of addressing the growing problem of youth violence. It may seem trite, but our children are our future: it is absolutely imperative that we provide them with the guidance they need to become responsible and productive adults. It's an investment we can't afford to delay.

And by investment, I don't just mean public funds for public programs. I mean talking to your own children about making good choices, avoiding bad situations and being careful about who they hang around with. It also means that we all have to give a little to the kids growing up next door or down the street. It means something as simple as saying hello, asking how your young neighbor is doing in school; it means calling his or her mother when you see that child doing something wrong; it means getting to know who belongs in your neighborhood and who doesn't. It means showing the child down the street how you grow your prize tomatoes or letting them help you when you change your tire. These are the simple lessons, the free tutorials that will stay with them for a lifetime – and maybe encourage them to give back someday, too.

When I was growing up, if I did something wrong, our neighbor Ruthie Thibeault would be on the phone with my mother in a minute. What Brockton needs is a whole lot of Ruthie Thibeaults: people who believe that all of Brockton's children are their own, who are willing to reach out, to talk to them, to look out for them. We can't just turn a blind eye, forget what we saw or heard – we have to show our kids we care.

EDUCATION

The Brockton Public Schools is the best urban school district in the state. Our high school was just named one of America's Best High Schools by US News &

World Report; our MCAS scores top all other urban districts at the high school level and our middle schools show continuous – and impressive – growth each year. But the fiscal realities the state is facing are going to hit our schools next school year: we're looking at a deficit in excess of \$10 million, and there is no area within the budget that is off limits as we work to close the gap.

As Mayor and Chair of the School Committee, I promise you that I will focus resources on the classroom. We will do our best to share resources between the city and school budgets as a means of preserving core services.

I am an example of the incredible education Brockton provides. I was a Brockton student, a Brockton High School graduate and my sister Mary is a 2nd grade teacher in Brockton. I've seen the wonderful education we provide and I am going to do everything in my power to make sure that our students have every opportunity that I had.

My commitment to education doesn't just extend to the public schools. Under my administration, Brockton will be a hub of adult education and training. I have convened an Education & Training Task Force to look at educational programs for adults, English language learners and at vocational and job training options for our citizens. Nathania Onyeagoro, senior resident services & programming coordinator for Beacon Management, will head this task force. Learning is a lifelong affair, and we must provide our citizens with opportunities to improve their skills and their job prospects.

And there are ways that we can all help: we need more role models, we need more tutors in our ESL classes, we need people willing to help a neighbor or friend create a resume or learn a skill, and we need parents to get involved in our schools.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Brockton was once the epicenter of the world's shoe industry, but those jobs have gone. Even Footjoy, the last bastion of "Shoe City" closed its plant last spring.

It's sad to see our history fade, but we are now at the dawn of a new age and Brockton is once again poised to be an industry leader. We're known around the country for the Grove Street brightfield project, which turned a former brownfield into a source of renewable, solar energy. Sky Vegetables is coming to Brockton to build one of the nation's first hydroponic farming systems – on the roof of a formerly abandoned property. The Massachusetts Biotechnology Council has awarded Brockton a Gold Rating as part of its BioReady Communities Campaign, so the word is getting out there.

Brockton is an incredibly attractive place for businesses to locate: we're perfectly situated halfway between Providence and Boston, we've got highway access, we have the job base and infrastructure - water, sewer and economic incentives. What we have to do is capitalize on our assets and market our city as the best place for the best businesses.

With the help of the city solicitor, I am reviewing the structure of Building A Better Brockton. In addition, I am working to identify funding sources to return planning to Brockton, because if we're going to grow into a center of 21st century commerce, we've got to have a 21st century growth plan.

Hard times bring great opportunities and it's a great time to reinvent ourselves so that when the economy turns around – and it will in the not too distant future – that Brockton will be ready.

I've formed an Economic Growth & Development Task Force chaired by local businessman John Lloyd to work on shoring up our employment base, growing our tax base and finding new ways to capitalize on emerging industries. John is the founder & principle of On Point Coaching, so he has a good background in employment growth. His task force is made up of members of the business community, an urban planner, a resident, a human resources executive and others to gain a broad perspective on the issues facing our workforce, and to find a way to give Brockton a leg up in attracting new business.

What I am asking residents, business owners and other stakeholders to do is crucial to the success of our efforts: I'm asking you to be Brockton ambassadors.

Brockton's image has been tarnished in the past, and we have to build a positive buzz. Whenever someone says, "oh, you live in Brockton," you smile and tell them why you live in Brockton: because it's a close-knit community with great people, great neighborhoods and great schools. If someone asks you why your business is here, you tell them it's because there's an abundance of talented and enterprising people who know what it is to work hard and want to.

Ask any marketing guru and they will tell you that word of mouth is often the most powerful tool in driving sales, building brand loyalty and creating buzz. Let's do it, people – we know what's good about Brockton and we need to tell our story every chance we get.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

I got involved in public service over 20 years ago because I wanted to be part of something bigger than myself. We are a city blessed by a number of very hardworking and giving people who devote their time and energies to making this city a better place.

But I've noticed a flaw: When you need to hold an after-prom breakfast? We call Joe, Sue and Mary. When you need a committee to raise some money for a new library? We call Joe, Sue and Mary. Need help building a new playground? We call Joe, Sue and Mary. Want someone to serve on the License Commission? Are Joe, Sue and Mary already on it?

Trust me; I know Joe, Sue and Mary really well. I've got their Christmas cards on my mantel. And these folks are the heart and soul of Brockton. But we need more of them. We need José's and Suzannahs and Margarets.

I am going to start by working to fill vacancies on our boards and commissions with new faces and by inviting new voices to join the conversation about Brockton's future. Trust me, our stalwarts will continue to be our conscience and our backbone, but they're also going to help me train new board and commission members, new volunteers and outreach workers, to make Brockton a more inclusive and diverse place. I am putting out the call: if you care about Brockton, please call. If you have skills or services to share: please call.

One of the things I love most about Brockton is its community spirit. Sure, we can sometimes seem like a city of grumblers, but when someone from the outside criticizes us, we stand together, bonded with cement. When one of our own has suffered a loss, there is always a community rallying cry: there are casseroles on the table, shoulders to lean on, and a collection of good intentions.

Over the years, in this esteemed chamber, presidents and statesmen have often been quoted – about triumphs and tragedies, challenges and change. We are lifted by those who went before us, and as Brockton's first woman mayor, I feel that more than most.

Eleanor Roosevelt said that "You can often change your circumstances by changing your attitude," and I think that is a fitting quote for our city and our time.

And she also said that:

"It is not fair to ask of others what you are not willing to do yourself."

I believe that and I will never ask you to do what I will not.

Our city is facing a major challenge, and we need everyone, and I do mean **EVERYONE**, to step up to the plate, to put themselves out there, to lay it on the line, so that we may all pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and make this is a 21st century city with a backbone of dedicated, energetic and innovative individuals.

Thank you.